

## 1894. SIR OLIVER MOWAT.

BY FRANK YEIGH.

THIS is verily an age of Grand Old Men. Every country seems to possess a citizen who stands out pre-eminently, though the calendar shows he has more than filled man's allotted span. Such instances go far to prove that advancing years need not involve incapacity and decrepitude. The very first name that occurs to one in this connection, is the old Hungarian Liberator, Louis Kossuth, who has just passed away in his ninety-second year. Such an one, too, is the Grand Old Man of the Vatican, who has filled the Pontifical chair for sixteen years, and who at eighty-four ably rules his ecclesiastical empire. And what a noble honor rôle Great Britain can show of Grand Old Men! Gladstone, with his eighty-four years, and his sixty years of Parliamentary life; Earl Grey, a statesman who has seen nine decades; Froude and Herbert Spencer, Newman Hall and Prof. Blackie. Germany has her Bismarck, a giant, though a trembling one, at seventy-nine; America boasts of a member of the New England guild of literature in Oliver Wendell Holmes, whose pen, at eighty-four, writes vigorously on the death of Parkman; France points to Pasteur and Leon Say, who have crossed the boundary line of three score and ten; Italy, in her new storm and stress period, turns to Crispi to take the national helm. Thus in almost every country, and in almost every department of life's activities, one can easily single out those who, by reason of their achievements, have deserved the title of Grand Old Men.

We, in Canada, have a few who have earned this distinction. Sir John Macdonald died at the age of seventy-six, after over forty years of exciting political leadership; Sir Charles Tupper,

at seventy-two, represents us in England; and Goldwin Smith, by reason of his seventy years, can now refer to himself as one of the growing-old fraternity.

Ontario has her Grand Old Man in Sir Oliver Mowat,—a man who was born in the year in which George III. died, and Queen Caroline was under trial; who came into the world as the great Napoleon went out, and when Canada was under its first Governor-General, Earl Dalhousie, and Lieutenant Governor, Sir Peregrine Maitland, was a familiar personage in what is now Ontario. Sir Oliver has seen the forest transformed into field and farm, and the land peopled by thousands where scores once lived. Such a man is, in truth, growing old, but the growth is so gradual and youth so tenacious in its hold of Ontario's premier, that Father Time may well be disconcerted. Even in these days of high-pressure civilization, Sir Oliver might justly claim that his life, though comparatively long, has not only been active but resultful. He has filled a great variety of positions, including those of ensign in a Kingston Militia Company, a practising attorneyship, the positions of school trustee and alderman, Queen's Counsellor and Vice-Chancellor, LL.D. and M.P.P., Provincial Secretary and Postmaster-General, and Premier and Attorney-General for twenty-one years.

His personality is interesting from many points of view. He is the son of John Mowat, a specimen of the stalwart, vigorous, clear-headed type of men that spring from Caithness soil. Whether the son shouldered the musket of a militiaman because the father was one of the line, may be hard to tell, but certain it is that John Mowat,

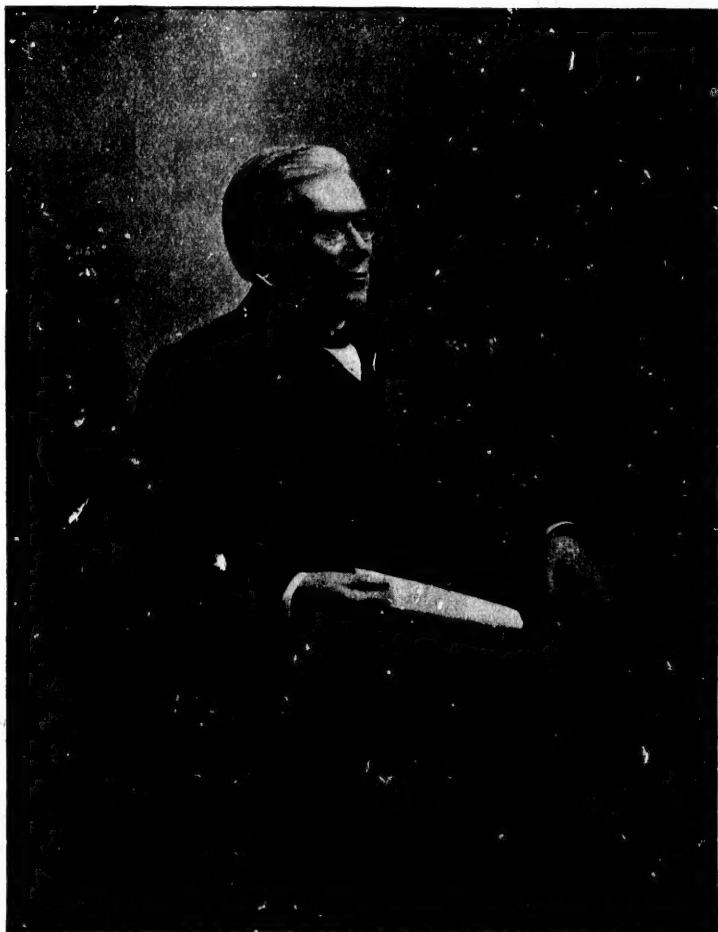
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when a mere lad, joined the "Third Buffs," as they were called, and saw active service in the Peninsular war, and in after years told many a tale of his adventures, and especially of the battle

good old fighting days. Retiring from the army, in 1816, he settled in the classic town of Kingston, where the future Premier was born on July 22nd, 1820.

Sir Oliver's school-boy days make



*From Forbes' Painting, 1893.*

*Oliver Mowat*

of Corunna, where Sir John Moore so bravely held the French in check. It is not improbable that he also visited the St. Lawrence on one of England's numerous military expeditions in those

a period of which the truest conception may best be gained from his own eloquent words spoken at the opening of the new Parliament buildings, in 1893:

I have been calling to mind that I have now outlived nearly all my early contemporaries and early associates, and many of later date. I call to mind that in my own time, and within my own memory, a transformation has been accomplished in the political condition of the province, and in everything that goes to make up a great and civilized community. I remember when neither our province, nor any other British province, had responsible government. I remember when the conduct of provincial affairs was not by the elected representatives of the population,



JOHN MOWAT, ESQ.,  
*Father of Sir Oliver Mowat.*

nor by persons of their appointing, or having their confidence. I knew the province when it had no municipal institutions, now known to be essential to local interests and local progress. I knew the province when the various churches amongst which its people were distributed, were not equal before the law; when the established church of old England was practically the established church here, and when there were claimed for it the exclusive rights and privileges of an establishment, and one-seventh of the whole land of the coun-

try. I remember the province when there was in it not one university, not one college, and no system of public schools. I remember when, at every election, there was but one polling place for a whole county, no matter how extensive; when the election lasted for a week, and when, except in towns, the only voters were freeholders. I remember when the province had not a mile of railway, nor, I believe, a mile of macadamized road. I remember when the principal cities of the present day were but villages—when this great city of Toronto was "Little York," and its population was three or four thousand. I remember when the whole province had—or was supposed to have—a population of but 150,000, and therefore less than the population now of Toronto alone. My memory thus goes back of the time when I began the practice of my profession here, a half century ago. The city had then a population of but 15,000, and Upper Canada a population of but half a million. The changes which have taken place in our province in that half century have been very great. Its progress in population, in wealth, in education, in intelligence, in political freedom, and in most other things which serve to make a country attractive and great, has in fact been enormous.

His early education was received chiefly from private tutors, nine in number, and all of whom, with one exception, have passed away.

Choosing the law as his profession he, strangely enough, entered the office of the man who was to become his strongest political foe for many years, John A. Macdonald, at the time but twenty-two years old, while the young student was seventeen. When he arrived at manhood, Mr. Mowat was called to the bar and practised for a short time in his native city, and then removed to Toronto, where he has since lived. In this city, where he commenced his public life as an alderman for the years 1857 and 1858, only two of his associates in the City Council now survive him.

In the practice of his profession in Toronto he made choice of the Equity

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branch, as distinct from Common Law, and, as a result of his mental attainments and successful professional practice he soon rose to eminence at the

Chancery bar. It was during this time that he argued and won what was known as the famous £10,000 case, a case involving the then Mayor of Toronto who had sold the debentures of the city at a profit which he put in his own pocket until an adverse verdict compelled restitution.

During the succeeding years of his professional practice, his advancement in

life. His first political speech was made in this year at a meeting called to discuss Hudson Bay Company matters.



SIR OLIVER AT TWENTY-FOUR.

South Ontario was the first constituency to choose him as its representative—a position in which he continued from 1857 until 1864. His first opponent was the late Justice Morrison. Referring to this representation in a recent address in South Ontario, Sir Oliver said:—

It is thirty-six years and more since I made my first appearance in the South Riding



SIR OLIVER AT FORTY-FIVE.



SIR OLIVER AT SIXTY-THREE.

his public career was rapid. He was appointed Queen's Counsel in 1856, as well as one of the commissioners to consolidate the Statutes of Canada and Upper Canada, and in the following year he entered upon parliamentary

of Ontario county as a politician, and twenty-nine years and a few months since I ceased to be the member for the riding. I don't see to-day many of the old faces that I used to see at political meetings during that time. I seem to

have survived most of my old South Ontario friends, and of my opponents too; and though some remain, most of these appear to have left the field of active politics to a younger generation. When I made my first appearance in the riding, I do not know that there were a dozen persons in the riding who knew me personally, but the electors were made aware that I had the confidence of the great Reform leader, Mr. Brown, and other prominent Reformers of that time, and that they desired to have me in Parliament. I discussed at public meetings in the riding the questions of the day, and when the election came on I had the honor of being selected and nominated as the Reform candidate, with the concurrence of the other aspirants for that honor. I remember with gratitude the hearty support which I received from them and from the whole Reform party, as well as from a sprinkling of Conservatives at that election and at subsequent elections. I represented the riding for nearly seven years. During those seven years it happened that I was five times before the people for election—thrice at as many general elections, and twice at bye-elections, the two bye-elections being in consequence of my accepting the office of Provincial Secretary in the Brown-Dorion Government of 1858, and of Postmaster-General in the Coalition Government formed in 1864, with Sir Etienne Tache as Premier, for the purpose of settling the difficulties between Upper and Lower Canada, and settling the difficulties which there also were between Protestants and Roman Catholics as to Separate Schools in Upper Canada, and kindred matters. I had also been Postmaster-General in the Macdonald-Dorion Government, formed in 1863, just before the general election of that year.

In 1864, the year in which he accepted the position of Vice-Chancellor, he formed one of the famous British North American conference at Quebec, where the terms of Confederation were settled. He is thus one of the fathers of Confederation. The passage of the Dual Representation Act in the Ontario Parliament caused another radical change in Sir Oliver's life, the

retirement of Edward Blake and Alexander Mackenzie from the Provincial House, in 1872, leading to his call by the Lieutenant-Governor to form a ministry. So he descended from the Bench and re-entered the arena of public life, and has ever since that time—twenty-two years ago—held the position of Premier and Attorney-General. This is a remarkable record for a government, a record without precedent in the history of British constitutional government, excelling even the record of the ministry of the second Pitt which remained in power from the end of the year 1783 until early in 1801—a period of seventeen and a quarter years.

Such is the career, municipal, legal judicial and parliamentary, sketched in briefest outline, of Ontario's Grand Old Parliamentarian! and in his 74th year he is donning the armor for another quadrennial contest with his political opponents. Notwithstanding his advanced years, there is reason to hope for a considerable prolongation of Sir Oliver's political career, for he comes of an exceedingly long-lived family, his father almost reaching the threshold of the seventies, his mother eighty-two years, his grandfather ninety, and a sister of his father's dying only a few years ago, in Caithness-shire, at the age of one hundred and one!

Sir Oliver may be said to be in his prime at seventy-four, a mellow middle-age, and though, as he is seen daily walking from his residence on St. George-street to his office in the eastern wing of the Parliament Buildings, a slow and cautious step, chiefly caused by short-sightedness, and a little of the over-bentness of the years, may be discerned, yet it only needs a conversation or a speech to convince anyone that the mentality, the keen perception, the legal ability to analyze a question, the readiness and skill in debate, and the vigor of attack or defence in political and parliamentary warfare, are as much his as when he

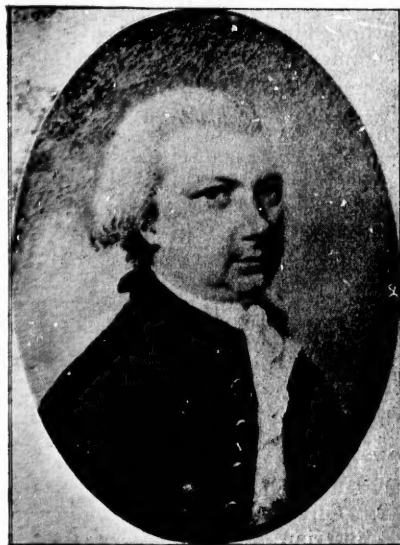


first entered the lists so many years ago.

It may be interesting to refer to the subject of this sketch in other and more personal connections. He first lived on Bay-street, and then he lived in "the yellow cottage" on Church-street, and later, in houses on Jarvis, Beverley and Simcoe streets. A few years ago he removed to St. George-street, occupying the same house as did Sir John A. Macdonald during his temporary retirement while Mr. Mackenzie was premier. This new home is a spacious one, with a home-like atmosphere that is most congenial. The library—a large room well lighted by a bay window—is Sir Oliver's chief workshop, and there he spends most of his time, surrounded by his law library, an extensive, valuable one, containing full sets of the leading reports and many rare and costly volumes. His collection of books, however, has run over, so to speak, into the hall-way and adjoining rooms, the shelves being filled with all that is representative in general literature, for the Premier has always been an extensive reader, and despite his public duties, finds time to keep abreast of whatever is worth knowing in current literature. As a boy, he was an omniverous reader, and as reading material was then scarce, his avidity for study even led him to read to a finish such works as the "Four-fold State," and similar old heavy theological treatises.

A glance at the library leads to a reference to the Premier as a worker. Such he is in the fullest sense of the term. With the aid of his capable and experienced private secretary, Mr. S. T. Bastedo, he accomplishes, even at his advanced age, what might well frighten a younger man. In the morning he deals with his correspondence, which is very large, covering a wide range of subjects. Six thousand letters a year is not an overestimate of his mail, and it is a matter of courtesy with him to have every communica-

tion answered. In addition, intricate and difficult matters are often referred to him for a decision by the various departments of the government; a great deal of legislation has to be considered, framed and "seen through the House;" and between one and two hundred meetings of the Cabinet Council have to be and attended, from which emanate over 800 orders-in-council yearly. Beside all this, three months of the year are taken up by the sessions of the Legislature, when



MR. WHITE,  
*Sir Oliver's Tutor.*

the ordinary routine of daily work is doubled, and the tax upon a minister's time and strength greatly added to. From nine, in the forenoon, till three or four o'clock in the afternoon, he works in his own library, and then, excepting during the session, spends from four o'clock till seven in his private office or the council chamber at the Parliament buildings.

It is always a source of wonder to easy-going people how Sir Oliver Mowat succeeds at seventy-four in accomplishing such a vast amount of

work, and still retains an exceptional degree of health. The explanation is simple. Trained habits of thought and labor make him, by concentrating his mind on the work before him, quickly seize upon its salient points and dispose of it while a life of regular and abstemious habits, temperate in the broadest sense, has its reward in a high degree of mental virility and physical strength. Another key to the secret is that the Premier gives place to a yearly holiday time. An ocean voyage that leads to John O' Groat's and the homes of his ancestors in Caithnesshire, is as effective a tonic as a summer in a White Mountain retreat, or a resting time by the sea. For some years he had a cottage at Caccouna. Last summer he made an extended trip to the Lake of the Woods district, and thereafter to the World's Fair—a programme of travel that might well have given pause to a younger man. But the Premier undertook it in the highest of spirits and returned with them undiminished. In 1881, he spent several months in Europe, and again in 1883, 1884 and 1888 visited England in connection with the Mercer Escheat Case, the Boundary Award Dispute and the Indian Lands argument before the Privy Council.

Sir Oliver is an adherent of the Presbyterian faith, and has been a member of the St. James' Square Church for some years, and rare indeed is it that he is missed from his pew on Sunday mornings. His catholicity of mind in religious matters is well known, and it is not a matter of surprise that he was chosen President of the Evangelical Alliance for several years in succession. Following Mr. Gladstone's example, Mr. Mowat finds recreation in a complete change of work, and during his holidays wrote lectures on "The Evidences of Christianity," and "Christianity and some of its fruits," both of which he has on several occasions delivered to large audiences and the former of which

has been published, and has had an extensive sale.

A clerical friend of the writer, who has filled one pulpit for forty years, is able to show a record of four hundred marriages and burials, and I believe Sir Oliver could show an almost equal record of speeches, had he kept track of them, during his half century of public life. While lacking some of the qualities of a successful orator, the Premier may be regarded as an effective speaker. No matter what the subject, or the occasion or the place, he is invariably listened to with the keenest interest, and never fails in that most difficult of feats—"catching the public ear." Without referring to any of his former utterances, one may well regard his more recent speeches as among the best efforts of his life, in their outline, scope, argumentative, force, and clear, intelligible English.

His public attainments have been recognized by our leading universities, Queen's College having conferred the degree of LL.D. upon him in 1872, and Toronto University in 1889.

As a Scotch Canadian he naturally allied himself with the St. Andrew's Society, in which his fifty years of membership has won for him a life membership.

The Grand Old Man of Ontario,—the legislative ruler of two millions and a quarter of people, and of an area twice as large as that of Great Britain and Ireland, larger than the German Empire, and almost as large as France, extending from the vine-clad, steaming flats of Pelee, in the latitude of Rome, to the frigid shores of Hudson Bay; and from the wedding of the waters of the Ottawa and the St. Lawrence to the far distant Thousand Islands of the Lake of the Woods—has altogether an almost unique record of political success, untarnished by personal corruption; a record which is not only a credit to himself, but, in a land where vigorous and able men abound, one on which even the strongest political op-

ponents can look, not only without severe criticism, but with a certain measure of national pride in his achievements. Friend and foe can join in saying, as was said of Othello, "He has done the State some service." His

Queen thus spoke when she conferred the honor of knighthood upon him, making the ensign of 1825, on and after the 24th of May, 1892, Sir Oliver Mowat, K.C.M.G.

## RED ALECK.

*A sketch of life in Prince Edward Island, three-quarters of a century ago.*

BY RUFUS CYRENE MACDONALD, M.D.

"YOU'RE ha coward, and don't dare to fight me!"

These words were spoken by a man whose round, close-shaven head was set, without any apparent neck, upon a pair of huge shoulders which terminated in massive arms which reached almost to the owner's knees. His coarse, broken-nosed face was fixed in a savage sneer as he gazed at the person to whom his words were addressed. This was a young man whose tall, lithe form was surmounted by a head and face shapely and beautiful. He did not appear to be daunted by the savage aspect of his accuser, and, although his face flushed till it was as red as his hair, he contented himself with saying:

"Weel, mon, it may be that I am a cooward, but I ha'e too much sense to fight wi' the likes o' you, just to mak' sport for the crood!"

It may be well to explain the cause of this episode. To do so we must transport ourselves back, well nigh three-quarters of a century, to a newly settled district of Prince Edward Island. Here John Yoe, a typical Englishman, had opened a ship-yard, in which, when they were not tilling their farms, many of the Scotch Highlanders who had settled in this new country found work. There were in the yard many Englishmen, and, as was to be expected from the still bit-

ter national animosity, there were continual hand-to-hand fights, in which the Scotch always came out victors. This stirred the pride and anger of the English ship-builder, and he swore to bring out from England a man who would thrash the Scotchies, one by one. For this end he had had sent to him a noted prize-fighter called "Surly Tim." He it was who used the words with which our story opens. He had been in the ship-yard but two weeks, and in that time he had thrashed a round half-dozen of the best fighters the Scotch could produce, till it came to pass that the Highland pride, which had soared so high, was now abased even to the dust.

The young man of whom I have spoken—"Red Aleck"—was, with one exception, the strongest man, although but twenty years old, in the settlement. On him the Scotch depended to raise up their fallen pride. He had not been expected at the ship-yard till the fall ploughing was over, and, in his absence, his friends made great boasts of his prowess. Surly Tim seized the first opportunity, after Aleck's arrival, to pick a quarrel with him, but, to the great astonishment of his friends, Red Aleck, who was generally eager for a fray, and, in fact, could rarely get one on account of his well-known strength, appeared strangely quiet under the insults of the Englishman.